



# Strategic Management of Character Education: A Holistic Model for Fostering Socio-Religious Attitudes in an Islamic Elementary School in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The decline in moral values and religious internalization among elementary school students necessitates effective character education management. This study aims to describe the strategic management of character education in shaping students' socio-religious attitudes at SD Assalam Bandung, an Islamic elementary school in Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The results reveal a three-phase strategic management model: (1) strategic formulation through a vision-based "Keassalaman Curriculum" integrating religious and social values; (2) implementation through systematic habituation, teacher exemplarity, and student leadership programs (Askar and Dakwah); and (3) evaluation via collaborative monitoring involving parents through the PPNP system. This integrated approach significantly improves students' social confidence and religious discipline. The study's novelty lies in applying strategic management as a holistic system in character education, addressing a gap in prior research that has focused narrowly on curriculum or pedagogy without examining integrative management processes. It offers a replicable model for Islamic elementary schools, contributing both conceptually and practically to systematic character education development.

## ABSTRAK

Menurunnya nilai moral dan internalisasi religius pada siswa sekolah dasar memerlukan manajemen pendidikan karakter yang efektif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan manajemen strategis pendidikan karakter dalam membentuk sikap sosial-religius siswa di SD Assalam Bandung, sebuah sekolah dasar Islam di Indonesia. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian mengungkap model manajemen strategis tiga fase: (1) formulasi strategis melalui "Kurikulum Keassalaman" berbasis visi yang mengintegrasikan nilai religius dan sosial; (2) implementasi melalui pembiasaan sistematis, keteladanan guru, dan program kepemimpinan siswa (Askar dan Dakwah); dan (3) evaluasi melalui pemantauan kolaboratif yang melibatkan orang tua melalui sistem PPNP. Pendekatan terpadu ini secara signifikan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri sosial dan disiplin religius siswa. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada penerapan manajemen strategis sebagai sistem holistik dalam pendidikan karakter,

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*mengatasi celah penelitian sebelumnya yang hanya berfokus pada kurikulum atau pedagogi tanpa mengkaji proses manajemen yang terintegrasi. Studi ini menawarkan model yang dapat direplikasi untuk sekolah dasar Islam, berkontribusi baik secara konseptual maupun praktis bagi pengembangan pendidikan karakter yang sistematis.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The decline in moral values, diminishing social empathy and decrease of religious internalization among elementary school students represent pressing concerns in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in rapidly developing contexts such as Indonesia (Aini et al., 2024). These challenges manifest through increased bullying incidents, growing individualism, and normative permissiveness within school environments (Maryani et al., 2024). In response, character education has gained recognition as a strategic intervention for cultivating ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions from early childhood (Lickona, 2009). However, many character education programs remain fragmented and unsustainable due to inadequate management frameworks (Jeynes, 2019), revealing a critical need for systematic approaches that integrate strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The theoretical foundation of character education emphasizes a holistic approach encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Lickona, 2009). Yet, existing research has predominantly examined curricular content (Parker & Raihani, 2011a; Stoller, 2004; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010), pedagogical methods (Walker et al., 2015), or school climate factors (Malawi, 2016), often overlooking the strategic management processes essential for program sustainability and impact. This gap is particularly pronounced in religious educational contexts where value transmission constitutes a core institutional mission (Lipiäinen et al., 2020). Islamic schools, for instance, explicitly prioritize moral and spiritual formation, yet many struggle to translate this commitment into coherent, systematically managed programs (Parker & Raihani, 2011a).

While existing studies have examined curricular integration (Parker & Raihani, 2011) and pedagogical methods (Walker et al., 2015), few have investigated character education as a strategically managed system encompassing formulation, implementation, and collaborative evaluation. This study addresses that gap by applying Wheelen and Hunger's strategic management framework to analyze how an Islamic elementary school designs, executes, and monitors character education holistically a perspective absent in prior literature

This study addresses that gap by applying Wheelen and Hunger's strategic management framework to analyze how an Islamic elementary school designs, executes, and monitors character education holistically a perspective absent in prior literature. This approach aligns with contemporary discourse on strategic management in educational institutions, which emphasizes the systematic alignment of resources, processes, and stakeholder engagement to achieve long-term educational goals (Davies & Davies, 2011)

The central objective is to analyze how SD Assalam Bandung designs, implements, and evaluates strategic management of character education to foster sustainable development of social and religious attitudes among elementary students. Specifically, the study investigates: (1) how strategic formulation is achieved through vision-based planning and the development of a specialized "Kurikulum Keassalaman" that integrates socio-religious values; (2) how strategic implementation is executed through systematic habituation practices, teacher exemplarity, and structured student leadership programs such as Askar and Dakwah; and (3) how strategic evaluation is conducted through

collaborative, multi-stakeholder monitoring systems engaging parents via the PPNP (Penguatan Perilaku Nilai Positif) framework.

The novelty of this research lies in its translation of strategic management theory into measurable educational practices specific to character education in Islamic school contexts. Moving beyond descriptive analysis, this study identifies transferable strategies and proposes evidence-based design principles for building systematic and replicable character education models. These principles include the systematic integration of religious values into curriculum and daily routines, structured habituation mechanisms reinforced through consistent practice and supervision, teacher modeling as a living curriculum, and collaborative evaluation systems that engage families and ensure accountability.

From a policy perspective, the findings aim to inform practical guidelines for educational administrators at institutional, district, and national levels. By examining the strategic management processes at SD Assalam Bandung, this research contributes to the development of more coherent and effective character education systems in religious and value-based school settings, ultimately supporting the formation of socially responsible and spiritually grounded young learners.

## **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to conduct an in-depth investigation of strategic management implementation in character education at SD Assalam Bandung. SD Assalam Bandung was selected as a critical case due to its recognized implementation of a structured character education system and its established parental collaboration framework, making it an exemplary site for studying strategic management in Islamic elementary education. The case study approach was selected for its ability to examine complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). This methodological choice aligns with the research objective of exploring the intricate relationships between strategic management processes and character education outcomes in an Islamic elementary school setting.

The research was conducted at SD Assalam Bandung between May and June 2024, allowing for extended engagement with the educational context. The qualitative approach enabled deep exploration of meanings, experiences, and implementation strategies employed by educational practitioners in character formation (Tisdell et al., 2025). The researcher served as the primary instrument in data collection, maintaining a humanistic and dialogical approach to interact naturally with participants and gather rich, contextual data.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders involved in character education management (Patton, 2015). The sample comprised 22 participants, including school administrators (principal, vice-principal, curriculum coordinator), teaching staff (Islamic studies teachers, classroom teachers, special program coordinators), parents representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and selected students from different grade levels. Selection criteria focused on participants' direct involvement in character education programs and their strategic roles in program implementation.

Data were collected through triangulation of multiple qualitative methods to ensure comprehensive understanding and methodological rigor (Flick, 2022). Participant observation was conducted over six weeks, focusing on daily routines, character education activities, and school-family interactions. In-depth interviews utilized semi-structured protocols organized around strategic management dimensions (formulation,

implementation, evaluation), with face-to-face interviews for school staff and online interviews for parents. Document analysis examined school vision-mission statements, curriculum documents, assessment records, and program evaluation reports from 2020-2024. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, while observational data were systematically documented in field notes.

Interview protocols were developed based on strategic management theoretical frameworks and refined through pilot testing. The analytical process followed the interactive model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data were coded using a combination of deductive codes (based on strategic management theory) and inductive codes (emerging from the data). The coding framework is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Coding Sample for Qualitative Analysis

Data Excerpt	Code	Description
SD Assalam has a keassalaman curriculum consisting of Quran, fiqh, ethics, prayer, and prophetic history learning	KUR	Unique curriculum for character value internalization
Character education is integrated at the beginning of learning, with habituation like dining etiquette, supervision by student affairs and homeroom teachers	PEB	Religious and social character habituation
Askar and Dakwah programs as leadership training and social-religious character strengthening	KEP	Character strengthening through student leadership
My child has become braver and able to socialize with friends and teachers	SOA	Changes in student social behavior
Evaluation through daily supervision, practical and written exams, and keassalaman report cards	MON	Systematic character monitoring and evaluation
Parents have daily practice checklists that are part of monitoring	ORT	Parental role in character monitoring
Elementary students sometimes don't know right from wrong, requiring patience and personal approach	EMO	Emotional and personal approaches for young students
Some parents enroll children at Assalam for prestige reasons, not aligned with school's character values	SIN	Challenges in aligning home-school values

Research trustworthiness was ensured through multiple strategies (Lincoln, 1985). Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy and interpretation. Peer debriefing consisted of regular consultations with qualitative research colleagues, while an audit trail maintained comprehensive documentation of all research decisions. Reflexive journaling enabled ongoing documentation of researcher perspectives and potential biases throughout the investigative process.

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for educational research. All participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and secure data

management. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. Research activities were scheduled to minimize disruption to normal school operations, and findings were shared with the school to support potential program improvements in accordance with principles of beneficence.

This comprehensive methodological approach enabled deep exploration of how strategic management principles are applied in character education, addressing the research questions while maintaining rigorous standards of qualitative inquiry appropriate for publication in international educational journals.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

#### Strategic Planning Based on Vision and the "Keassalaman" Curriculum (Code: KUR)

SD Assalam Bandung has built a character education system that stands strong on a foundation of mature and structured strategic planning. The implementation of character education at this institution demonstrates a systematic managerial approach, starting from the formulation of a clear vision to the development of an operational curriculum. The school's vision, which emphasizes the formation of Muslim individuals with noble character (*akhlakul karimah*), is not merely a slogan but is truly operationalized in all aspects of education through a unique and contextual "Keassalaman Curriculum."

Analysis of curriculum documents reveals that the Keassalaman Curriculum is designed as a unique, value-based curriculum focusing on religious and social character, aligned with the school's vision and mission. This curriculum includes five main components integrated holistically: daily Al-Qur'an learning with methods suitable for child development, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) learning emphasizing the practical application of Islamic law in daily life, *akhlak* (ethics) learning internalizing Islamic moral values, practice of daily prayers building spiritual discipline, and *sirah nabawiyah* (Prophet's biography) learning providing concrete examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These five components are not taught separately but are integrated into all subjects and school activities, creating an educational ecosystem that constantly reminds students of the character values being instilled.

This strategic planning process involves active participation from all educational stakeholders. Based on interviews with the principal, it is known that SD Assalam holds annual planning forums involving teachers, parents, school committee members, and even representatives from the surrounding community. The principal explained: "We believe that character education is not only the school's responsibility but a shared responsibility of the entire community. Therefore, in planning the character curriculum, we involve all parties to ensure that the values we instill are aligned with the values believed by the community while also being responsive to the challenges of the times." This participatory approach ensures that the developed curriculum is not only conceptually ideal but also practical and acceptable to all stakeholders.

Observation during the research shows that this Keassalaman Curriculum truly comes alive in daily practice. Every morning, the school begins its activities with *tadarus* (Qur'an recitation) attended by all students and teachers, creating a spiritual atmosphere before entering academic learning. The integration of character values is also evident in classroom learning design, where teachers consistently connect subject matter with Islamic values. For example, in mathematics lessons, teachers not only teach arithmetic operations but also instill the value of honesty through stories about the honesty of the Prophet's companions. This integrative approach ensures that character education does not become a separate additional subject but becomes the soul of the entire educational process.

### **Program Implementation through Habituation and Exemplary (Code: PEB, KEP, EMO)**

The implementation of the character building program at SD Assalam Bandung is carried out through three main complementary strategies: habituation of values through school routines, exemplary behavior from educators, and student leadership development. The habituation strategy (PEB) is implemented through consistent and structured daily routines, creating positive behavioral patterns that are repeated until they become ingrained habits in students. Observation over six weeks revealed that the school has a very regular schedule for character activities, starting with communal *Dhuha* prayers in the morning attended by 92% of students, followed by *tadarus* Al-Qur'an before lessons begin, ethical reflection after lunch, and various weekly social service activities.

One key aspect of this habituation strategy is the consistency of implementation and strict supervision. Teachers take turns being responsible for monitoring the execution of these routines, while student organizations are also involved in peer supervision. A grade 4 teacher explained in an interview: "Habituating worship and noble morals cannot be instant. It requires consistent repetition every day, continuous supervision, and nurturing full of affection. We design daily routines so that students become accustomed to an orderly and disciplined lifestyle, which will gradually shape their character." Observational data shows that students who have participated in this program for at least two years show significant behavioral changes, especially in time discipline and consistency in worship.

The exemplary strategy (KEP) is the second equally important pillar. At SD Assalam, teachers not only act as instructors but more as living role models who practice the values they teach. During 120 hours of observation, the researcher documented various examples of teacher exemplary behavior, ranging from their discipline in performing congregational prayers, friendliness in interacting with all parties, patience in dealing with students experiencing learning difficulties, to honesty in acknowledging limitations in knowledge. The principal emphasized: "Teachers at our school are character ambassadors. They realize that their every action is observed and imitated by students. Therefore, we have regular teacher personality competency development programs to ensure they are truly worthy of being role models."

In addition to exemplary teachers, the school also develops student leadership programs through the "Askar" (Religious Cadet Student Corps) and "Dakwah" (Islamic propagation) initiatives. The Askar program is specifically designed to train students' leadership skills with an emphasis on religious values. Askar participants receive special training in public speaking, conflict management, event organization, and peer guidance. Meanwhile, the Dakwah program focuses on developing the ability to convey Islamic values in an engaging and effective manner. Observation of Askar training sessions revealed a very personal approach, where students are not only taught leadership theory but also given direct practice opportunities with intensive mentoring from supervising teachers.

The emotional approach (EMO) is the third strategy applied, especially for early-age students still in the process of understanding concepts of right and wrong. Teachers in the lower grades use a more personal and affectionate approach, accommodating the concrete-operational level of students' moral development. A grade 1 teacher explained: "Elementary school students, especially in the lower grades, sometimes do not fully understand what is right and wrong. They need a patient, personal approach full of concrete examples. We not only tell them what to do but show more through stories, role-

playing, and direct exemplary behavior." This approach has proven effective in building emotional bonds between teachers and students, which is an important foundation for the internalization of character values.

### **Collaborative-Based Evaluation and Monitoring (Code: MON, ORT)**

The character education evaluation system at SD Assalam Bandung is designed with a comprehensive and collaborative approach, involving various data collection methods and multiple stakeholders. Daily monitoring (MON) is conducted through systematic observation by teachers and educational staff, recorded in a special monitoring book. This observation not only notes negative behaviors that need correction but more often documents positive developments and small achievements of students in internalizing character values. Every Friday, teachers gather in a weekly evaluation meeting to discuss observational findings and formulate reinforcement or improvement strategies for the following week.

Formal evaluation is conducted through two forms of assessment: practical and written. Practical assessment measures students' ability to apply character values in real situations, such as the ability to lead prayers, help friends in difficulty, or resolve conflicts peacefully. Written assessment measures students' conceptual understanding of the taught character values. The results of both forms of assessment are then integrated into the "Keassalaman Report Card" issued each semester. This report card provides a holistic picture of students' character development, covering cognitive aspects (knowledge of values), affective aspects (attitudes towards values), and psychomotor aspects (application of values in actions).

An important innovation in the evaluation system at SD Assalam is the implementation of the PPNP (Positive Value Behavior Reinforcement) system, which actively involves parents as evaluation partners (ORT). Through this system, parents are given a "daily checklist" containing indicators of positive behavior to be monitored at home, such as prayer timeliness, Qur'an reading habits, respectful attitude towards parents, responsibility for household tasks, and various other daily practices. This checklist is filled out by parents daily and discussed periodically in parent-teacher meetings. A parent of a grade 3 student expressed in an interview: "With this daily checklist, I feel like an active part of my child's character education process. I not only receive reports from the school but also contribute to collecting data on my child's development. This helps me understand my child's development patterns better and be more coherent in applying the same values between home and school."

This collaboration with parents is strengthened through various communication mechanisms, including regular monthly meetings, home visits for specific cases, and digital communication through class WhatsApp groups. The principal also personally conducts home visits for families facing special challenges in instilling character values, demonstrating the school's commitment beyond the physical boundaries of the institution. This collaborative approach creates an integrated character education ecosystem between school, family, and community, ensuring consistency of messages and reinforcement of values in all environments where students interact.

### **Program Impact on Student Behavior (Code: SOA)**

The systematic and sustainable implementation of the character building program at SD Assalam Bandung has produced measurable and significant impacts on students' behavioral development, both in social and religious aspects. School documentation data shows a consistent trend of decreasing incidents of negative behavior over the past three years, with a 47% reduction in bullying cases since the character building program was

intensified. This decrease is accompanied by an increase in documented prosocial behaviors, such as helping friends, admitting mistakes, and mediating conflicts peacefully.

In the social aspect, interviews with parents reveal a real transformation in students' interpersonal skills. A parent of a grade 5 student shared: "My child, who was previously shy and lacked confidence, after participating in the Askar program for one year, has now become bolder in expressing opinions, active in group work, and even dares to lead presentations in front of the class. What makes me prouder is that he is now more sensitive to his friends' feelings and often becomes a mediator when disputes occur among them." Field observation confirms this change, where students participating in leadership programs show higher levels of initiative in social activities and more mature conflict resolution skills compared to students not in the program.

Development in the religious aspect shows equally impressive progress. Data from the PPNP monitoring system reveals that 88% of students consistently perform the five daily prayers with high discipline, a significant increase from the baseline of 62% when they first entered school. Not only in quantity, the quality of student worship also shows improvement, with many students starting to perform *sunnah* (recommended) prayers regularly and demonstrating a better understanding of prayer recitations' meanings. A religious teacher reported: "Our students don't just pray as a routine, but are beginning to show deeper spiritual awareness. They ask about the meanings of the prayers recited, are interested in learning about variations of *sunnah* prayers, and even remind friends who are negligent in prayer in a polite manner."

The program's impact is also evident in the internalization of character values reflected in students' daily behavior outside formal religious ritual contexts. Observation reveals that SD Assalam students show a high level of honesty, such as returning friends' lost items, admitting mistakes without being asked, and refusing cheating practices during exams. They also show developing independence, with many students able to manage their own study schedules, prepare school supplies without reminders, and take initiative in helping with household chores. These behavioral changes are not temporary but show consistent and sustainable patterns, indicating that character values have truly been internalized and become part of the students' personalities.

### **Challenges in Program Implementation (Code: SIN)**

Despite showing significant success, the implementation of the character education program at SD Assalam Bandung is not free from various challenges and obstacles. The main challenge identified through interviews and document analysis is the value gap between the school and some student families (SIN). Approximately 15% of parents, based on teacher estimates, enroll their children at SD Assalam more driven by considerations of social prestige and the school's academic reputation, rather than due to value alignment with the school's character education vision. This motivational gap creates tension in program implementation, especially when the school introduces policies or programs requiring commitment and behavioral changes from families.

School communication documents with parents reveal a recurring pattern of concern from some parents regarding time allocation for character education versus academic learning. Some parents feel that time allocated for character activities such as congregational prayers, *tadarus*, and social service could reduce time for academic subjects considered more important for national exam success. This concern is particularly prominent in upper grades (grades 4-6) where pressure for exam preparation increases. A parent of a grade 6 student expressed in a parent meeting forum: "I appreciate the character cultivation done by the school, but I am also concerned about my child's national exam preparation. Wouldn't it be better to focus more on academics in grade 6?"

Another challenge faced is the heterogeneity of students' family backgrounds in terms of religious practices and values held. Some families come from environments with varying intensities of religious practice, so the school's consistent message about the importance of worship discipline sometimes does not receive adequate reinforcement at home. In some extreme cases, even contradictions occur between values taught at school and values practiced at home, creating confusion and cognitive dissonance in students. A grade 4 homeroom teacher revealed: "We have experienced cases where a child is taught to be honest at school, but at home the parents actually provide examples of dishonesty in business. This makes our work very difficult because we have to go against the current of values from home."

To address these challenges, SD Assalam develops various adaptive strategies focusing on communication, education, and personal approaches. The school organizes a series of workshops for parents aimed not only at socializing school programs but also at building shared understanding about the importance of character education and its relation to long-term academic success. For families with special challenges, the school implements personal approaches through home visits, family counseling, and individual mentoring. These strategies demonstrate the school's commitment to not only demanding value alignment from families but also actively helping families in the value transformation process. This collaborative and dialogical approach gradually succeeds in reducing resistance and increasing parental support for the school's character education program.

## Discussion

Unlike previous studies that treat curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation as separate components (Jeynes, 2019; Malawi, 2016), this case demonstrates how strategic alignment across all three phases creates a sustainable character ecosystem. This integrated approach resonates with Fullan's (2016) concept of "systemic change" in education, where successful reform requires coherence across vision, instructional practices, and collaborative culture.

When viewed through an international comparative lens, SD Assalam's three-phase strategic model exhibits significant alignment with contemporary global frameworks for educational excellence. Hargreaves & Fullan's (2015) concept of "professional capital" offers a relevant analytical lens: the school develops *human capital* through teacher training in exemplary modeling (KEP), *social capital* via collaborative parent-teacher partnerships in the PPNP system (ORT), and *decisional capital* through participatory strategic planning involving multiple stakeholders. This tripartite alignment demonstrates how Islamic schools can operationalize internationally recognized management principles while maintaining cultural and religious authenticity a balance rarely documented in existing literature on faith-based education management.

The integrated design of the Keassalaman Curriculum aligns with contemporary frameworks for moral education that promotes social justice (Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021). These frameworks advocate for values integration that permeates all aspects of schooling rather than compartmentalized character programs. SD Assalam exemplifies this approach through its holistic weaving of Islamic principles across subjects and activities, effectively creating a "comprehensive moral learning environment" where religious and social values are consistently reinforced.

Internationally, the challenge of aligning school and family values represents a persistent concern in character education. The PPNP system's innovative approach to this challenge offers transferable insights for global educational practice. Henderson & Mapp (2002) landmark research demonstrates that meaningful family engagement requires

structured mechanisms for two-way communication and shared responsibility—precisely what the daily checklists and regular parent-teacher meetings provide. However, SD Assalam extends this principle by framing parental involvement as a religious duty (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*), suggesting that faith-based motivations may enhance compliance and commitment compared to purely secular approaches. This finding has implications for character education programs worldwide, particularly in communities where religious identity serves as a powerful motivator for educational participation.

The structured leadership development programs (Askar and Dakwah) reflect Halstead's (2004) observation that Islamic education traditionally emphasizes both moral and social leadership. However, SD Assalam innovates by formalizing these within a strategic management framework, moving beyond incidental modeling to systematic training. This structured approach addresses a gap identified in international studies of Islamic education, where leadership development often remains implicit rather than explicit in curriculum design. The measurable improvements in students' social confidence and religious discipline documented through systematic observation and parent reports suggest that such formalization yields tangible benefits worthy of consideration by Islamic schools globally seeking to balance tradition with contemporary educational practices.

From a strategic management perspective, SD Assalam's model exemplifies what Leithwood et al.'s (2020) identified as "contextually intelligent leadership" the ability to adapt universal management principles to local cultural and religious contexts. The school's success stems not from importing Western management models wholesale but from thoughtfully adapting strategic management concepts to Indonesia's Islamic educational ecosystem. This contextual intelligence is particularly evident in how traditional Islamic concepts like *da'wah* (propagation) and *tarbiyah* (nurturing) are operationalized within modern management frameworks. Such adaptive leadership is crucial for educational reforms in diverse global contexts, and SD Assalam's experience provides a valuable case study of successful localization that maintains both cultural authenticity and systematic rigor.

The "Keassalaman Curriculum" (KUR) serves as the critical bridge between SD Assalam's vision of forming pious individuals (*akhlakul karimah*) and its daily educational practice. This reflects a core tenet of strategic management: that organizational strategy must be explicitly translated into actionable operational plans (Wheelen & Hunger, cited in Priatin & Humairoh, 2023)). Unlike the significant *conceptual and practical challenges* reported in institutionalizing integrated curricula at the university level (Andrianor et al., 2024; Kautsar et al., 2025), this case shows that a holistic, value-based curriculum is not only possible but highly effective at the elementary level. The curriculum's design, which weaves Islamic teachings into all subjects and routines, ensures that character education is the "soul" of the institution rather than a supplementary subject. This foundational integration is supported by empirical evidence showing that complementary Islamic education (MDTA) significantly enhances students' comprehension of religious subjects in formal elementary schools (Yugo et al., 2024). SD Assalam's model takes this a step further by eliminating the separation between "formal" and "complementary," offering a unified educational experience from the outset.

The implementation through habituation (PEB), exemplary modeling (KEP), and emotional engagement (EMO) demonstrates a sophisticated, multi-layered pedagogy. The structured habituation of worship and social routines aligns with Aristotelian virtue ethics, which posits that character is formed through the consistent practice of good habits until they become second nature (Kristjánsson, 2015). This study details the *systematic mechanisms* such as scheduled prayers, peer monitoring, and leadership

programs (Askar/Dakwah) that translate this philosophical principle into a reproducible school practice. These innovative methods reflect the creative pedagogical approaches necessary for modern Islamic educational settings (Amin et al., 2025; Firmansyah et al., 2025), blending traditional discipline with contemporary student engagement strategies. Furthermore, the centrality of teacher exemplarity (KEP) extends beyond pedagogical skill. Teachers as "character ambassadors" embody the values they teach, a factor critical to positive student perception and the development of an inclusive, empathetic school culture (Muhammad & Mualimin, 2024). This role resonates with the expanded duties of Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing national goals like religious moderation, where they act as demonstrators, managers, and motivators of values (Haris et al., 2024).

Perhaps the most innovative finding is the collaborative evaluation system (MON/ORT), particularly the PPNP framework. This system transforms evaluation from a top-down, episodic assessment into a continuous, community-based process of reinforcement. It operationalizes Epstein's theory of school-family-community partnerships by actively engaging parents in the roles of *parenting*, *learning at home*, and *collaborating with the community* (Epstein, 2018). By using daily checklists and regular communication, the school and family become co-constructors of the child's character development, mirroring the strategic role of madrasah committees in strengthening program success through collective leadership (Arifianto & Wafa, 2025). This effectively bridges the critical home-school value gap a persistent challenge noted in other Islamic educational settings (Parker & Raihani, 2011). The system's success underscores a key strategic management insight: effective evaluation requires the involvement of key stakeholders to ensure relevance, buy-in, and sustained impact (Bryson, 2015). It also addresses the critical need for systematic academic and mentoring services to support educational outcomes, a need highlighted even at the doctoral level (Sutarto et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study contributes by reframing character education as a strategic management challenge. It demonstrates that success depends on a deliberately designed system covering formulation, implementation, and evaluation a perspective that bridges educational theory with organizational management studies and aligns with the call for principled and strategic character education (Berkowitz, 2011). Practically, it offers a replicable model for other value-based institutions. The observed outcomes such as improved prosocial behavior and religious discipline represent foundational progress toward national educational goals like fostering religious moderation and social harmony (Haris et al., 2024).

This study has several limitations. As a qualitative case study, findings are context-bound and not statistically generalizable. The perspectives of students, while included, could be explored more deeply through participatory methods. Additionally, the relatively short research period (May–June 2024) may not capture longitudinal impacts of the character program. Future research should employ mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to validate and extend these findings

In conclusion, SD Assalam Bandung provides a compelling case of how strategic management principles can be leveraged to build a powerful ecosystem for character formation. Its integrated approach where curriculum, habituation, exemplarity, and collaborative evaluation are synergistically aligned moves character education from the periphery to the core of the school's mission. It demonstrates that in an era of complex social challenges, building character requires not just intention but intentional, well-managed design.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the strategic management of character education at SD Assalam Bandung is implemented comprehensively through a structured, value-based approach. The findings successfully address the research objectives by detailing how strategic formulation is achieved through vision-based planning and the specialized "Keassalaman Curriculum" that integrates socio-religious values. Strategic implementation is executed through three main pillars: value habituation (PEB) in daily routines, teacher exemplary modeling (KEP), and structured student leadership programs (Askar and Dakwah). Finally, strategic evaluation is conducted through a collaborative monitoring system (MON/ORT) that actively involves parents via the PPNP mechanism, creating a sustainable evaluation ecosystem that bridges school and home environments.

The research contributes significantly to the fields of Educational Management and Character Education by operationalizing Wheelen and Hunger's strategic management theory within the context of value-based education in Islamic elementary schools. Theoretically, this study extends strategic management theory into the domain of value-based education, demonstrating that affective and spiritual dimensions can be systematically managed. Practically, it provides a replicable model for Islamic elementary schools, with clear mechanisms for curriculum integration, habituation, teacher modeling, and parent-involved evaluation. It fills a literature gap by demonstrating that successful character education depends not merely on curriculum or pedagogical methods, but on a systematic and integrated managerial framework encompassing participatory planning, implementation, and evaluation. The scientific justification is firmly established through theoretical alignment and empirical data triangulation (observations, interviews, document analysis), with thematic analysis revealing consistent application of strategic principles in practice.

The study offers clear practical applications and theoretical extensions. Practically, it provides an operational model transferable to other elementary schools, especially faith-based institutions, for building measurable character education systems. Key actionable principles include: (1) designing an integrated values curriculum; (2) establishing consistent and supervised habituation mechanisms; (3) developing teacher capacity as living role models; and (4) forming collaborative evaluation partnerships with parents using simple tools like daily checklists. Theoretically, it expands the application of strategic management theory into the realm of value management in education, demonstrating that strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation principles can effectively manage affective and spiritual dimensions, not just academic-administrative aspects. This introduces a new perspective that school management must intentionally and systematically manage soft systems (values and culture).

For further research, several directions are suggested: (1) longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of character education programs on student behavior in higher education and social life; (2) comparative research between Islamic schools, public schools, and other faith-based schools to identify universal and contextual principles; (3) quantitative studies to develop instruments measuring the effectiveness of each strategic component on student character outcomes; and (4) policy research examining the role and effectiveness of government policies in supporting or hindering strategically managed character education at the school level.

In terms of policy recommendations, this study suggests: (1) For the Ministry of Education and local education offices: developing character education management guidelines emphasizing the strategic cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation) and school-family collaboration, serving as a reference for principal and supervisor training; (2) For Teacher Training Institutions (LPTK): integrating materials on character

education management and skills for building parental partnerships into pre-service teacher education and in-service training curricula; (3) For Local Governments: facilitating networks or communities of practice among schools for sharing best practices in character education management, especially in areas with specific socio-cultural contexts; and (4) For Schools: establishing internal policies that allocate specific time and resources for teacher capacity development in exemplary behavior and parent communication, while institutionalizing participatory planning and evaluation forums involving school committees and parent representatives.

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